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ABSTRACT

This biographical/bibliographic guide provides profiles of three Afro-Brazilian writers: Jorge de Lima (1893-1953); Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama (1830-1882); and Abdias do Nascimento (1914-). The life of each author is briefly described and sources of English language translations together with critical studies of their works are listed. Four sources are given which present general studies of the role played by Blacks in the evolution of Brazilian literature. The information presented supplements the author's "Afro-Brazilian Literature: A New Dimension for Black and Latin American Studies Curricula." (KH)

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Three Afro-Brazilian Writers: A Supplemental Guide for Black and Latin American Studies Curricula

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The primary objective of this bio/bibliographical guide is to offer profiles of three Afro-Brazilian writers and provide sources of English language translations together with critical studies of their works. The information contained here serves to supplement that included in my "Afro-Brazilian Literature: A New dimension for Black and Latin American Studies Curricula" (ERIC, 1986, ED 268 206) and, accordingly, can be used to help broaden the scope of general courses in black and Latin American studies.

General studies of the role played by blacks in the evolution of Brazilian literare are available in Raymond S. Sayers, The Negro in Brazilian Literature (New York: Hispanic Institute in the United States, 1956); Gregory Rabassa, The Negro in Brazilian Fiction Since 1888 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1977); David Haberly, Three Sad Races, Racial Identity and National Consciousness in Brazilian Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and David Brookshaw, Race and Color in Brazilian Literature (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986).

Jorge de Lima (1893-1953)

The son of abolitionists who for two generations refused to utilize slave labor on their property, Jorge de Lima was born in União dos Palmares in the northeastern state of Alagoas on April 23, 1893, only seven years after slavery had been legally abolished in Brazil. Of mixed blood, he graduated in medicine and practiced first in Alagoas and later in Rio de Janeiro, where he also taught Luso-Brazilian literature at the Federal and National Universities. He died in Rio de Janeiro on November 15, 1953.

During the twenties, Jorge de Lima became an important member of the literary movement known as Modernism and wrote both religious and regional poetry. In much of the latter the Afro-Brazilian figures of Lima's native northeastern Brazil are an essential element. In this poetry Lima not only used blacks as subjects but incorporated African rhythms and Afro-Brazilian vocabulary as well. The result was the beginnings of Brazilian verse comparable to the negrista poetry produced in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The poetry of Jorge de Lima is significant in that it does not merely describe social conditions, but attempts to delineate the very soul of blacks in his country: their lives and passions, their daily activities, religious beliefs, and yearnings. One of his earlier negrista works, "Essa negra Fulô," won the poet immediate acclaim and has become a classic of Brazilian poetry.

This work, a successful poetic vignette of the sociology of the Brazilian family during slavery, was designated by the critic Tristão de Athayde as the most representative work of modern Brazilian poetry. Possessing a strong regional flavor strengthened by the incorporation of two popular nonsense rhymes, "Essa negra Fulo" has been translated into numerous languages, set to music, and recorded.

Sensitive to the exploitation of blacks in the development of the Brazilian nation, Jorge de Lima did not usually protest in a strident manner, but restricted his poetry to stoic statements of the injustices to which blacks were subjected. Typical of this technique is the poem "Pai João," in essence, a retrospect of the life of a dying faithful slave. Other regionalist poems in which Lima focused on black figures were published under the titles Poemas (1927), Novos poemas (1929), Poemas escolhidos (1935), and Poemas negros (1947).

Works available in English: Among the numerous translations of "Essa negra Fulô" are the following: "Fulo's Ballad," Hortensia Ruiz del Vizo, Black Poetry of the Americas, Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1972, 129-131; "That Negress Fulo," Artur Ramos, "Negro Poetry and Jorge de Lima, Midwest Journal 2(1950): 73-75; "Black Fulô," James H. Kennedy, "Jorge de Lima: Brazilian Poet," Black World Sept. 1973: 19-22; "That Nigger Fulow," Jose Neistein and Manoel Cardoso, eds., Poesia Brasileira Moderna: A Bilingual Anthology, Washington, D. C.: Brazilian-American Cultural

Institute, 1972, 97-101; Translations of "Pai João": "Daddy John," Dudley Fitts, ed. Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Poetry Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1942, 63; "Old Joe," American Prefaces [Iowa City: Iowa] 7.2 (Winter, 1942): 162-163; James H. Kennedy, "Jorge de Lima: Brazilian Poet," Black World Sept. 1973, 23; Translations of other poems can be found in Neistein and Cardoso; John Nist and Yolanda Leite, eds. Modern Brazilian Poetry, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1962; Elizabeth Bishop and Emanuel Brasil, eds. An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1972; Alan Lomax and Raoul Abdul, eds. 3000 Years of Black Poetry, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1970. Biographical/Critical Sources: Fitz, Earl E., "The Black Poetry of Nicolas Guillen and Jorge de Lima: A Comparative Study," Inti [Univ. of Connecticut] 4: 76-84; Kasdorf, Hans, "Jorge de Lima: The Medical Poet-Priest of Northeastern Brazil," College Language Association Journal 14 (1970): 75-86; Nunes, Maria Luisa, "The Black Poetry of Jorge de Lima," College Language Association Journal 19 (1975): 418-431; Preto-Rodas, Richard A., "The Black Presence in Two Brazilian Modernists: Jorge de Lima and Jose Lins do Rego," Tradition and Renewal. Essays on Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature and Culture, ed. Merlin H. Forster, Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975, 81-101; Sayers, Raymond S., "The Negro in the Poetry of Modernismo," Semana de Arte Moderna Symposium, ed. Claude L. Hulet, Los Angeles: Latin American Center, Univ. of California, 1972, 128-145; Sovereign,

Marie F., "The Double Itinerary of Jorge de Lima's Poetry," Luso-Brazilian Reivew 11: 105-113.

Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama (1830-1882)

Luiz Gama was the son of an unknown Bahian nobleman of Portuguese descent and the free African Luiza Mahin. At the age of ten, Gama was sold to slave traders by his father and was taken to São Paulo, where, after eight years of servitude, he obtained proof of the illegality of his bondage and ran off to join the army. By the 1850s Gama had secured a civilian position in the São Paulo Police Department. At this time he initiated his abolitionist activities and began writing poems for newspaper publication.

Gama's only book, Primeiras trovas burlescas, published in 1859, was well received by critics and the reading public in general. This collection of poems included verses which lampooned the pseudo-white Brazilian aristocracy for its social snobbery, European ways, and mania for whiteness. Gama directed satiric barbs particularly against those who considered themselves pure white even when black characteristics were plainly visible and others who confused cultural values with race. In his most widely read poem, "Quem sou eu?", Gama wittily claimed to have relatives among all social classes because all Brazilians, regardless of wealth and social rank, were either black or, like himself, mulatto.

Gama dedicated his life to the campaign for emancipation and came to be regarded as the leader of the abolitionist movement in São Paulo. Continuing his journalistic activities, in 1864 he founded the Diabo Coxo, a humourous periodical--the first of its kind in São Paulo--in which he published political and social satire as well as anti-slavery propaganda. Gama subsequently joined the editorial staff of the newspaper Radical Paulistano, which included such leading abolitionists as Rui Barbosa (q.v.), Joaquim Nabuco (q.v.), and Castro Alves (q.v.). Gama is credited with having written the first Brazilian poetry which sang of the love for black women. His verses proclaiming the African heritage of all Brazilians were a rational contribution to abolitionist ideas of the day and of influence on authors of anti-slavery literature.

Works available in English:

"If all the supstart nobles in these regions," (from the poem "Sortimento de Gorras" in Janheinz Jahn's Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing, New York: Grove Press, 1968, 124; "Who I Am" (from the poem "Quem Sou Eu?") in Alan Lomax and Raoul Abdul, eds, 3000 Years of Black Poetry, New York, Dodd, Mead, 1970, 97-98.

Biographical/Critical Sources: Raymond Sayers, The Negro in Brazilian Literature, New York, Hispanic Institute in the United States, 1956, 105-107; James H. Kennedy, "Luiz Gama: Pioneer of

Abolition in Brazil, Journal of Negro History, 59.3 (1974): 255-267; Zelbert Laurence Moore, "Luiz Gamz, Abolition and Republicanism in São Paulo, Brazil, 1870-1888," Dissertation, Temple University, 1978.

Abdias do Nascimento (1914-)

Abdias do Nascimento, together with the Afro-Brazilian actor Aguinaldo de Oliveira Camargo, founded the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theater) in Rio de Janeiro in 1944 to train black actors and actresses and to stimulate the creation of dramatic texts reflecting black history, culture, and heroes. After the group's successful production of Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones, performed under the direction of Nascimento at the Municipal Theater of Rio de Janeiro on May 8, 1945, the Teatro Experimental do Negro produced a series of Afro-Brazilian plays that were subsequently published in his anthology entitled Dramas para Negros e Prólogo para Brancos (1961).

Nascimento's own play, Sortilégio (Mistério Negro), written in 1951 and included in the anthology, was banned by government censors for six years before being produced in the Municipal Theater in Rio de Janeiro in 1957. Using a black theme in a modern and aggressive manner, this work revolutionized the concepts of black theater in Brazil, and, according to French sociologist Roger Bastide, occupies the same place in Brazilian literature that Native Son occupies in Afro-American literature

in the United States. In 1978 a revised version of the play was published in English under the title Sortilege (Black Mystery). In 1949 and 1950 Nascimento was editor in chief of Quilombo, a newspaper of cultural and current events of the Afro-Brazilian community. In 1968 he founded the Museum of Black Art in Rio de Janeiro and also published O Negro Revoltado, a compilation of the proceedings of the First Congress of Afro-Brazilians, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1950.

Nascimento moved to the United States in 1968, served as visitng lecturer at the Yale School of Drama and subsequently visiting fellow at the Wesleyan Center for the Humanities (Wesleyan University). In 1970 he accepted a professorship at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he served as director of the University's Puerto Rican Studies Research Center. In 1982 Nascimento returned to Brazil and was elected to a seat in the National Congress.

As a civil rights activist and essayist, Nascimento has published a series of treatises exposing racism and cultural oppression and has promoted a theory of social change called quilombismo. In 1983 he founded Afrodiáspora, a journal of black world thought issued in Portuguese and English. Nascimento's adamant stance against racism and his constant support of black culture have served as a great stimulus to young Afro-Brazilian writers and artists.

Works available in English:

"African Culture in Brazilian Art," Journal of Black Studies, 8.4 (1978): 389-422; "Afro-Brazilian Art: A Liberating Spirit," Black Art, 1.1 (1976): 54-62; "Afro-Brazilian Theater: A Conspicuous Absence," Afriscope [Lagos] 7.1 (1977): 27-33; Mixture or Massacre? Essays in the Genocide of a Black People, Buffalo, Afrodiaspora, 1979; "The Negro Theater in Brazil," African Forum, 2.4 (1967): 35-53; "Open Letter to the First World Festival of Negro Arts," Présence Africaine, 30.58 (1966); "Quilombismo and the Afro-Brazilian Artist," Caribe [New York] (April 1980): 16-17; "'Racial Democracy' in Brazil: Myth or Reality?", Ibadan: Sketch Publishing, 1977; Sortilege (Black Mystery), Chicago, Third World Press, 1978.

Biographical/Critical Sources:

Frederic Litto, "Some Notes on Brazil's Black Theatre," The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas, Ed. Lloyd W. Brown, Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1973, 195-221; Sterling Plumpp, "Racial Democracy in Brazil (Myth or Reality?)," First World 2.2 (1979): 21-25; Doris J. Turner, "Teatro Experimental do Negro and Its First 'Black' Drama," Caribe [New York] (April 1980): 11-15; Ronald M. Rassner, "Palmares and the Freed Slave in Afro-Brazilian Literature," Voices from Under: Black Narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean, Ed. William Luis, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984, 204-221.